



## Mermaids Support Marine Life

by Devon Ellington



**Katharine Hurd and Kathy Zagzebski**  
Courtesy of Michelle Bosch Photography  
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An amazing organization nestles on Main Street in Buzzards Bay. It's called the National Marine Life Center (NMLC), and its mission is "rehabilitating for release stranded sea turtles, seals, dolphins, porpoises, and small whales, and to advancing scientific knowledge and education in marine wildlife health and conservation."

Run by a small, passionate staff (three of whom were profiled in this publication's [Fall 2011 issue](#)), the Center's sea turtle ward in the hospital re-opened in August 2011 after a successful inspection by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Once the hospital is complete, it will be able to care for larger marine life, including seals and dolphins. Dolphin strandings were at an all-time high last winter, with 214 on Cape Cod according to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

The hospital's expansion helps to fulfill the Center's vision, as does the money from NOAA through the John H. Prescott Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program to set up a marine mammal parasitology lab.

Education and outreach are also vital parts of the organization, with a variety of programs that educational organizations can book, daily on-site educational programs, and internship opportunities for students planning to dedicate their lives and careers to marine science.

The signature event supporting all that NMLC has going on is the Mermaid Ball.

The Mermaid Ball launched in 2007 as a lively, fun way to get the Marine Life Center's name out into the community, raise awareness of the need for the hospital, and raise the funds for it.

Held in August, the Ball allows the more whimsical, magical side of the staff and attendees to shine, encouraging people to attend in costume. Pirates, mermaids, and other sea creatures abound for an evening of live music, good food, dancing, and conversation. The 2011 event, and now the 2012 event, were held at the Willowbend Country Club in Mashpee. The windows were covered in plywood to protect from the storm, but inside the room was a glittering, enchanted undersea grotto, intimate and elegant all at once.

Katharine Hurd took over as chairperson for the Ball, helping steer the Ball through hurricane-threatened reefs in 2011, and returns in 2012. "After attending my first Mermaid Ball in 2009, I realized first-hand what an amazing organization the NMLC is," she says.

"The Mermaid Ball is the major fundraiser of the year. Not only is it a spectacular event of its own accord, but it's the driving force that focuses energy and excitement toward the much-needed marine animal hospital and education center in Buzzards Bay.

"I am... especially pleased that we were able to again secure the prestigious Willowbend Country Club in Mashpee. I am proud we have this event as a vehicle to educate the public and raise funds to support the NMLC in such a joyous fun-filled evening."

She reiterates that, "The money raised during the Mermaid Ball goes directly to the NMLC's non-profit organization,

dedicated to rehabilitating for release stranded marine life on our Cape Cod shores."

Joy and humor are as much a part of the Ball's appeal as the glittering jewelry and gorgeous artwork by local artists up for auction. Pirates roam the event, praising, joking, and dancing with attendees. The details of silk, organza, ribbon, beading, and braid on the costumes are stunning, and watching the dancers glide across the floor is spellbinding.

It's like having the best parts of magical sea tales come to life. There's nothing staid or stiff about the Ball, and yet it has an easy, captivating elegance. It's the perfect marriage of imagination and sophistication.

Kathy Zagzebski, the Center's Executive Director, agrees. "The Mermaid Ball is a wonderful event that combines fun, whimsy, and elegance. I love to see the costumes and outfits people come up with! It feels good to see so many people come together to raise funds for marine animal rehabilitation, science, and education."



The 2012 Mermaid Ball takes place on Saturday, August 25th from 6 - 10:30 pm  
at Willowbend Country Club in Mashpee [www.mermaidball.com](http://www.mermaidball.com)

The 2012 Mermaid Ball takes place on Saturday, August 25th from 6 - 10:30 p.m. at Willowbend Country Club in Mashpee. Tickets are \$125 per person, but you can save \$25 if you purchase your tickets before June 25. Be a sponsor, be a participant, come in costume! Read more information at [www.mermaidball.com](http://www.mermaidball.com).

As Jeff Luce, Board Member and Pirate Captain says, "Hello and Ahoy Mateys ! The Captain thanks and invites all my Pirate brothers and sisters to once again attend the Mermaid Ball and bring some 'booty' for the National Marine Life Center. Our past efforts have done amazing things but we are not yet ready to drop anchor and rest while there is still treasure out there for the NMLC. Let's fill their chest with pieces of eight !!!!!"



Devon Ellington is a full-time writer, publishing under a half a dozen names in both fiction and nonfiction. **Hex Breaker**, the first Jain Lazarus Adventure, will be released by [Solstice Publishing](http://SolsticePublishing.com) later this year.

Her romantic suspense novel, **Assumption of Right** (as Annabel Aidan), was released last summer from Champagne Books, and is available both digitally and in print.

She writes articles, short stories, business-related materials, and is included in several anthologies. Her plays are produced in New

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